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“Messianicity Without Messianism”: On the Place of Religion in the Philosophy of Jacques Derrida

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Jacques Derrida’s concept of “*messianicité sans messianisme*” (“messianicity without messianism”) as an important example of rethinking the role and nature of religion in the late period of the work of the philosopher. Historical and philosophical analysis demonstrates that the appeal to the problem of messianism is inherent to many Jewish philosophers of the early twentieth century. They tried to develop a concept of time that would maintain full openness to the future and at the same time remember the past. Their work affected the interpretation of messianism in Derrida, because he developed his concept in discussion with Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Lévinas. As the most general structure of the experience of justice, openness to the undecidable future, and respect for other messianicity do not exclude the religious manifestations of messianism, calling instead for the unceasing deconstruction of their fundamentalist claims.

KEYWORDS

Jacques Derrida, religion, messianism, messianicity, hospitality, other

Introduction

The overall goal of this article is to examine the rethinking of religion in contemporary continental philosophy as illustrated by Jacques Derrida’s concept of messianicity, which, according to many scholars, was the most influential form of philosophical interpretation of messianism during the twentieth century. With this aim in mind, we will start exploring the resurgence of the ideas

of hope and the future in the works of the key Jewish thinkers of the beginning of the twentieth century. Then we will analyze how their work affected the interpretation of messianism in Derrida, who developed his concept in conversation with Walter Benjamin and Emmanuel Lévinas. The central part of the article will study in great detail the peculiarities of the Derrida's interpretation of messianicity as a primordial structure of experiencing an openness to the coming of the others when we are unable to foresee their arrival. It is impossible to predict what is coming, or to become ready for it. It should be noted that Derrida's idea of messianicity is strongly linked to his conceptualization of an alterity. It's also worth noting that *other* is a key word in Jacques Derrida's terminology. The concept of otherness is essential in all of his work, even when it is examined with varying methods. According to Derrida, this concept cannot be reduced to a simple linguistic formulation; every other is wholly other, and any idea of the other is open to paradoxes and aporias. However, close reading of Derrida's work proves that he calls it "something that is completely other, something that cannot be returned to the same by any form of dialectical sublation" (Miller, 1996, p. 155). The Derridian concept of the other that implies absolute singularity of every being has essential consequences for moral obligations, political activities and religion. As we will demonstrate, Derrida's notion of messianicity does not exclude the religious phenomena. We will conclude with an analysis of the full range of interpretations that Derrida's concept of messianicity has been received. While some researchers have interpreted it as a clear sign of the religious intentions of the late Derrida's philosophy, others have maintained the atheistic nature of the concept, as simply deconstruction.

Appealing to philosophical thought when developing the theological concept of messianism is a recent phenomenon related to historical developments during the last two centuries. One of the main paradoxes of modern history is that the unprecedented growth of violence and the cruelty that characterizes it have been accompanied by a previously unknown revival of the concepts of hope and the future. The decisive role played in this process belongs to a number of prominent Jewish intellectuals who were active during the beginning of the twentieth century (Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno, Gershom Scholem, among others). They all sought to clarify the nature of the relationship between European and Jewish culture, as well as find answers to current social and political challenges. As the French philosopher Pierre Bouretz (2003/2010) emphasized, their versions of the messianic utopia were developed as a faithful companion to twentieth-century suffering and terror, and at the same time as a form of protest against the concept of the irreversible progress of the world – that is, against the horrific excesses of immanence. By promoting the concept of being "witnesses of the future," they rejected the idea of the past as completed and done with, they defied attempts to predict the blind future, and they encouraged resistance toward the view of man "having become purely a historical being" (Bouretz, 2003/2010, p. 11). Their purpose was to remember the past and tradition while also developing a concept of time that retains full openness towards a future, which cannot be confined by any horizons of significance and expectation. Philosophical reflection on messianism continued during the second half of the last century.

Derrida's Messianicity in the Context of Jewish Philosophical Messianism

It should be noted that while attention to ethical and religious issues is inherent to Derrida's later work, the texts from his early years also address topics related to religion. Already in *Glas* (Derrida, 1974/1986), the question of religion is the focus of the philosopher's attention in his reading of Hegel's early texts. Between 1980 and 1990, Derrida turned to the analysis of negative theology and the problems of the translation of sacred texts, as well as to phenomena such as confession, faith, hospitality, and gifts. Works of this period call into question the established treatment of Derrida's philosophy as promoting atheism and late period modern secularism. Is it possible to talk about the appeal to religion of a philosopher who has gone to so much effort to critique the metaphysics of presence, which is so important to religious discourse? According to Derrida, the fundamental feature of the history of western metaphysics is the modality of thinking about Being in terms of presence. Human thought and language always refer to something external, and the Being is an ultimate reference and "transcendental signified" of our discourses. As such, it provides a metaphysical justification of certainty of human knowledge. Derrida claims that metaphysics of presence is a profound mistake since it fails to recognize that human understanding of reality is linguistically mediated. His philosophical project intended to undermine the possibility of disregarding the linguistic mediation of reality by deconstructing the "transcendental signified." At first glance, deconstruction is not favorable to religion. If the idea of God is regarded as the name of transcendental signified, then the classical theistic view of the omnipotent God as a ground of all meaning can be deconstructed as a merely human concept. However, as the reading of Derrida's texts shows, he is not interested in returning to traditional theism. His purpose is much more radical, for he is convinced that the God of conventional theism has become a thing of the past. Derrida tries to think of God and faith after Enlightenment skepticism, the death of God, and the destruction of metaphysics.

"Messianicity" is one of the essential leitmotifs of the final decade of Derrida's work. Philosopher explores traditional theological themes without reference to religion as an established system of dogmas, mode of social organization, or a foundation for the moral life. The methodology of Derrida's employment of theological concepts is well illustrated by his reflections on the nature of religion in *The Gift of Death* (Derrida, 1992/1996). The ambiguity of the issue of death is understood here as the context for analyzing the responsibility of free subjectivity, access to which is provided by religion. However, religion here doesn't mean traditional denominational beliefs and practices, but what Derrida defines as "religion without religion," that is, not classical theism or institutional patterns of religion, but a form of faith that does not require an event of revelation for its existence.

Derrida addressed problems of messianism initially in the essay "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas" (Derrida, 1967/2001). Lévinas' project was aimed to break with Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology, which by attempting to possess and know the Other, concealed its infinite alterity and reduced it to the Same. Derrida offers an extensive critique of Lévinas'

interpretation of Husserl and Heidegger and questions his explanation of the ethical relationship in a face-to-face encounter. He also analyzes Lévinas' appeal to the tradition, which is beyond the bounds of the key concepts of Greek thought, namely to "messianic eschatology." It is certainly not that Lévinas' philosophy is based on the religious texts of Judaism or is a form of "Jewish theology" or "Jewish mysticism." Moreover, the philosophy of Lévinas "can even be understood as the trial of theology and mysticism" (Derrida, 1967/2001, p. 103). In this sense, Derrida is close to Lévinas himself, who in *Totality and Infinity* denies the idea that eschatological theologies can supplement philosophical discourses through their prophetic proclamations of the ultimate purpose of being and through offering a clear picture of the future. In order for the "eschatology of messianic peace" to gain significance in philosophical thinking, it needs, according to Lévinas, a primordial and original relation with being, a "relation with being beyond the totality or beyond history" (Lévinas, 1961/2011, p. 22).

Derrida interprets this "beyond" as an appeal to experience itself, to practice, and to the irreducible alterity of the other. Therefore, owing to eschatology, which goes beyond all totality and objective experience and awakens people to the fullness of their responsibility, a figure of the other is discovered, which, according to Lévinas, cannot be understood within the framework of traditional philosophy, and which is the sole source of ethics. Thus, in one of his earliest texts, Derrida picks up on Lévinas' idea of messianic eschatology and uses it to assess if Lévinas' efforts to go beyond Greek philosophical tradition are productive.

It should be noted that despite the fact that for the first time Derrida addresses the subject of messianism under the influence of Lévinas, an even more important role in the development of his conception of the messianic was played by the philosophical legacy of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), the author of one of the most influential versions of the philosophical understanding of messianism.

Written shortly before his tragic death in September 1940, Benjamin's *On the Concept of History* (Benjamin, 1996) denies that historical progress will inevitably lead to the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Instead, the thinker underpins his own conception of historical time, the defining aspect of which is the idea of breaking, active messianic intervention in the course of events. Refusing to interpret the historical process as a homogeneous and linear "empty time," Benjamin claims that every moment of the history is "the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 397). For Benjamin, temporality of "a time to come" is not of future as coming present, "but that of the future anterior, a time in which future and past do not so much come together as come about one another, doing so in a way that circumvents conventional modalities of presence and holds time open to the coming of another (Levine, 2014, pp. 5–6).

The sudden arrival of the Messiah and the end of the history of the world – that is to say, large-scale historical transformations – can occur in an unprogrammed way, at any moment, even when their arrival is not expected. They are possible only as the radical interruption of linear time. Therefore, Benjamin is trying to defend the possibility of a revolutionary breakthrough in a situation where its occurrence is not conditioned by any socio-economic realities. Here we find an echo of the widespread

belief in Jewish mysticism that glimpses of future salvation can be found in the present. In this context, it should also be noted that the experience of the moment as a moment of the symbolic unity of the religious community and its intense expectation of salvation is also inherent in the philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig. The author of *The Star of Redemption* (Rosenzweig, 1921/2005) emphasizes that the community must be in a state of intense expectation that the Kingdom of God is about to come. This experience of maximum intensity reveals an important paradox: the balance between the concentration of history in one moment interacts with a permanent delay, shifting the finale of history into the future. A critical moment of world history is approached by people who "have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 390) – people who seek justice for the dead, forgotten in the whirlwind of historical cataclysms. They do not cherish the vain illusion that a happy future is coming as a result of rampant scientific and technological progress but retain the memory of a "secret agreement between past generations" who seemingly expected that new generations will set them free from stories written by the victors.

The question of the degree of influence of Benjamin's "weak messianic power" on Derrida's "messianicity" remains debatable. At first glance, the approaches of the two philosophers are close enough, since both appeal to Marxism and employ the notion of messianism. What is common to Benjamin and Derrida is "a certain messianic weakening," or the refusal to give some specific content to the messianic promise or to determine the form of the messianic event. On this basis, John D. Caputo even argues that Benjamin's "weak messianic power" and Derrida's "messianicity" are expressions of the same idea (Caputo, 1997, p. 352). However, commenting on Benjamin's statement about weak messianism in *Specters of Marx* (Derrida, 2006), Derrida argues that the logic of his messianic thought is "turned toward the future no less than the past, in a heterogeneous and disjointed time" (Derrida, 2006, p. 228). Thus, while Benjamin's weak messianism contains a strong ethical impulse, calling for remembering the forgotten victims of history (or those who are at risk of oblivion), his appeal to the past carries with it the risk of losing focus on the future – that is, giving attention to what is always yet to come. History could be addressed with the critical selection of the heritage we want to bring to the future. The work of mourning is not a one-time task that can be accomplished and completed, but is rather an indication of an important way of being human. At the core, the formation of subjectivity takes place in the process of mourning, inheriting what is passed on from previous generations and developing an awareness of one's duty toward them. We are not able to bring the dead back to life, but we are capable of witness and sorrow. It is impossible to establish justice and prevent the recurrence of wrongs from the past simply by "burying" the past. Instead, one should constantly practice the "work of mourning" with its continued attention to the past for the sake of preserving the messianic hope for the future.

Thus, the decisive difference between Derrida's messianism and Benjamin's weak messianic power lies in the various "logics of inheritance." For Benjamin, it is important to preserve the totality of the past in order to perpetuate the memory of the forgotten victims of coercion and injustice, as well as to open up the possibility of

reawakening the past in an era of revolutionary catastrophes that threaten to forget about the suppressed. According to Derrida, the duty toward the past consists not so much in preserving a certain tradition, but in remembering the past for the sake of repeating and confirming the difference of the other.

Mourning over difference requires a kind of “exorcism,” but not in order “to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive as *revenants* who would no longer be *revenants*, but as other *arrivants* to whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome – without certainty, ever, that they present themselves as such” (Derrida, 2006, p. 220). Although inheritance confirms the return of the past, this past, paradoxically, is a time yet to come, a time that is fundamentally different from any other period in history that we know of. The task, therefore, is to open the past for the future, to leave in it the cracks through which newness can enter, to provide an opportunity for the disruption of the usual course of things.

Messianicity as Openness to the Arrival of an Unpredictable Other

Messianicity appears as a sign of the openness towards the future that is fundamentally unpredictable. This radical openness to the possibilities of the forthcoming offers a hope for coming of justice. Undoubtedly, openness is never absolute – at every step forward something from the past is lost, and every moment of inheritance opens new possibilities for transformation and the multiplication of tradition. The driving force and at the same time the vulnerability of the gesture of inheritance Derrida exposes in the concept of promise. According to the general structure of promise, the future (that is, not the future in conventional sense of the word, but the radical future – what Derrida calls *l’avenir*) always exceeds any prediction or calculation. Derrida denies an understanding of time as a sequence of modalized presents – the past is not the present that is past, and the present is not a mere result of the past. For this reason, the future cannot be regarded as a projected continuation of the present. It is not a descriptive empirical future, but a messianic eschatological future, an expectation of the arrival of an unpredictable other, in which our “come” is turned to the point that we cannot determine, predict, or calculate in advance who or what is coming.

Messianicity calls for inheriting those texts of the past that are most open to the future. This approach is exemplified by Derrida’s interaction with the legacy of Marxism, in which he sees the most striking modern manifestation of messianic hospitality, “certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*” (Derrida, 2006, p. 111).

As Derrida explains in his important essay *Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Faith and Knowledge at the Limits of Reason Alone* (Derrida, 1996/2002), messianicity is depicted not as a religious phenomenon, but as the primordial general structure of experiencing an openness to the forthcoming (*l’avenir*) beyond any horizon of expectations defined by religious conceptual schemes. This messianic dimension does not depend on any messianism; it does not come from a definite revelation of

the Abrahamic religion. Its essence consists in “movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event” (Derrida, 2006, p. 112). In contrast, religious and political messianisms form in advance a set of expectations and prophetic predictions that determine how, where, when, and under what conditions the other may appear. Because messianisms contain a predetermined horizon of expectation, they inevitably commit violence towards unique singularities.

Thus, it is anticipated that we will extend radical hospitality to the *arrivant* without imposing on him any prior obligations or conditions. Derrida defines it as “a waiting without horizon of expectation,” that is, “awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* from whom or from which one will not ask anything in return” (Derrida, 2006, p. 211). An example of this register of an appeal to the present to go beyond itself is Derrida’s interpretation of a “democracy-to-come,” which means not a specific form of government but something fundamentally different, something that still has to come, going beyond the previously known. The effectiveness of a democratic promise is linked to the eschatological expectation of some unpredictable alternativeness. It cannot be identified with any particular embodiment of democracy but calls for the endless transformation of the societies that exist here and now.

In explaining the meaning of the messianic, Derrida repeatedly uses the famous Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud. He appeals to this story, influenced by the earlier interpretations of Blanchot (1980, pp. 214–215). Aggada begins with Rabbi Joshua ben Levi meeting the prophet Elijah and asking him when the Messiah will come. The prophet replies that the rabbi can ask this question directly of the Messiah, for he is sitting at the gates of Rome dressed in rags. When the rabbi reaches Rome and indeed meets the Messiah in the company of the poor at the gates of Rome, he asks him, “When will you come?” and the Messiah answers, “Now.” Derrida notes a discrepancy, an inadequacy between the generalized and specific “now” in this story. In the same way that the Messiah is not waiting and is coming right now, we should anticipate the coming of the future right at this moment in time. The Messiah is not some future present; his coming is here and it is inevitable. The parable points to the messianic structure as responsibility, for the coming of the event. At the same time, Derrida notes the “ambiguity” of the messianic structure: we can expect the arrival of the other, hoping in reality that he will not come, that the arrival of the Messiah will remain in permanent delay. Derrida points out that “we wait for something we would not like to wait for” (Derrida, 1997, p. 24), or as John D. Caputo explains, “The Messiah must always be to come. The Messiah is a very special promise, namely, a promise that would be broken were it kept, whose possibility is sustained by its impossibility” (Caputo, 1997, p. 162).

Although Derrida calls for a careful delineation of the notions of messianism and messianicity, he still leaves the question of the connection between them open. Religious and political messianisms always announce the arrival of a clearly defined

messiah at a certain time and place. When the Messiah actually comes, as soon as the future really becomes a definite presence, the messianic will immediately cease to exist, because its essence lies in the expectation of what is yet to come. The proclamation of the arrival of the Messiah will pave the way for the other whose messianic experience is different from your messianism. Derrida's Messiah is the one we hope to come to, even though we know he will never come. This is an impossible opportunity of the future. The impossible goes beyond the possible, not as its direct opposite, but as the desire to overcome what is obviously predictable. The coming of the Messiah, his full presence, would deny any messianic expectation. By pointing to a particular Messiah, confessional messianism defines the future and limits it to the scope of specific messianic determination. Justice and expectations become related to counting, program, conformity, and predictable outcomes.

Idea of Messianicity and Religious Messianisms

Derrida emphasizes that although his idea of messianicity is not related to what is considered to be the essence of religious messianisms, that is, the historical revelation and figure of the Messiah, it does not mean that they should be dismissed as absurd eschatological fabrications. He refuses to identify messianicity with messianism, since the latter is always associated with a particular religion, limited by a specific cultural environment and a dogmatic system of beliefs. Derrida's secularized messianicity retains its separation from specific socio-cultural and religious contexts, allowing it to be a truly universal category. At the same time, as the most general structure of experience, messianicity does not exclude religious manifestations of messianism. At a roundtable at Villanova University (1997), Derrida explained his position in more detail.

When I insisted in *Specters of Marx* on messianicity, which I distinguished from messianism, I wanted to show that the messianic structure is a universal structure. As soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting for someone to come: that is the opening of experience. Someone is to come, is now to come. Justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the other, with the promise. Each time I open my mouth, I am promising something. When I speak to you, I am telling you that I promise to tell you something, to tell you the truth. Even if I lie, the condition of my lie is that I promise to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise. This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – that is what I call the messianic structure. This messianic structure is not limited to what one calls messianisms, that is, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism, to these determinate figures and forms of the Messiah. As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism, then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences.

Then you are accrediting one tradition among others and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism. That is why I think that the difference, however subtle it may appear, between the messianic and messianism is very important (Derrida, 1997, p. 23).

Having stressed the necessity to maintain a distinction between the concepts of messianism and messianicity, Derrida still hesitates about the true nature of their relationship, considering two possible hypotheses in *Faith and Knowledge*. According to the first one, messianicity is the most basic structure of experience, which has particular representations in historical messianisms. In this case, messianicity should be viewed on the same basis as the general structure of the *Offenbarkeit* (Revealability) developed by Heidegger in *The Question of Being* (Heidegger, 1957/1958), in order to clarify specific ways of Being's revealing itself and to evaluate their authenticity. Religions are then only concrete examples of the universal structure of messianicity, and its study later involves first of all research into the fundamental ontological conditions of the possibility of religion. At the same time, Derrida suggests another hypothesis, according to which the *Offenbarung* (Revelation) of Abrahamic religious traditions were absolute, unique events, through which universal possibilities of messianicity have shown themselves. Derrida does not give a definitive answer as to which of these hypotheses is more likely; he would like to find an explanation that combines both. The philosopher points out that, although his notion of messianicity is significantly different from that of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, it still depends on these singular events of revelation.

Interpretations of Derrida's Messianicity

Derrida's concept of messianicity has a wide range of interpretations. While some researchers have assessed it as clear confirmation of the religious intentions of the late Derrida's thought, others have insisted on the atheistic nature of the concept, as all deconstruction. The atheistic reading of Derrida was supported by the Swedish philosopher Martin Hägglund. In his view, widespread theological interpretations of Derrida's thought are inconsistent. The trajectory of deconstruction fits in completely with the logic of radical atheism, which not only denies the existence of God and immortality, as does traditional atheism, but also denies the very possibility of a person's desire for God and immortality. In the seeming pursuit of infinite being and fullness, Hägglund sees a desire to survive, to increase life expectancy that is determined by an openness to the unpredictable future that can either enrich or destroy us. "I argue that the so-called desire for immortality dissimulates a desire for survival that precedes it and contradicts it from within" (Hägglund, 2008, p. 1).

Hägglund also sees radical atheism in Derrida's concept of messianicity. Although this concept, more than any other, led to the suspicion that the philosopher secretly cherished the religious hope for salvation, according to Hägglund, such readings of Derrida's thought are based on confusion of the notions of messianicity and concrete religious forms of "messianism". In Derrida's vocabulary, messianicity

is just another name for the undecidable future, which creates a chance for the desirable, but at the same time threatens it from within. At the same time, traditional messianism is a religious or political belief in the future that will put an end to time, replacing it with an eternal tranquility that cannot be destroyed. The only common feature of messianicity and religious messianism is the formal structure of the promise of the coming, by which Derrida reads messianism against itself. Thus, Häggglund concludes that Derrida is inverting the logic of religious eschatology. Derrida emphasizes that the coming of the other does not contribute to the end of time, but always exceeds any definite end of life or history. His version of eschatology proclaims not the end of time, but only absolute openness to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the future. In addition, messianic hospitality for the future is not connected to the promise of peace. The *arrivant* may not be the bearer of peace, the Messiah, but as Derrida recognizes, the wrongdoer, the bearer of hatred, evil, and violence.

John D. Caputo, an American philosopher and one of the influential proponents of the use of deconstruction in religious thinking, disagrees with such a reading of Derrida¹. In his interpretation, the concept of messianicity refers to the core of Derrida's special religion, "of the call for a justice, a democracy, a just one to come, a call for peace among the concrete messianisms" (Caputo, 1997, p. xxviii). The difference between messianicity and messianism is interpreted as the difference between peace and war. The messianism of concrete, historical religions is always a source of exclusivism and violence, while the true meaning of messianicity lies in the promise of divine peace and the Kingdom of God accessible to all. Treating a specific religious tradition as the possessor of higher knowledge, granted only to God's chosen people, is a formula for endless war. For instance, Derrida viewed the conflict in the Middle East as a merciless war of dangerous "messianic eschatologies", driven by the desire to prove the truth of a particular version of messianism. Therefore, as opposed to confessional messianism, Caputo draws attention to the proclamations of the biblical prophets, who reminded their readers that God is seeking not ritual sacrifices, but justice for all oppressed people. In this approach, deconstruction is seen as the salvation of religion, because it cleanses it of its worst instincts.

Responding to Häggglund's reading of Derrida in an atheistic perspective, Caputo argues that the Swedish philosopher misunderstood the deconstructionist's interest in religion as an effort to protect common religious beliefs and denominational tenets. Relying on Derrida's distinction between faith and religion, Caputo defines the purpose of deconstructing religion in its reimagining as "religion without religion", that is, more primordial faith (*foi*), quasi-transcendent for both theism and atheism, which are just different forms of dogmatic beliefs (*croyances*). This faith does not

¹ For instance, see Derrida, J., & Caputo, J. D. (1997). *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press; Caputo, J. D. (1997). *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press; Caputo, J. D., Dooley, M., & Scanlon, M. J. (Eds.). (2001). *Questioning God*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press; Caputo, J. D., & Scanlon, M. J. (Eds.). (2005). *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.

exist in a state of unbroken peace; it is not protected from doubts, error, evil, violence, or death. Rising from the abyss of unbelief, this “unprotected religion” is more open to uncertainty and structural risk. As Caputo points out that in his analysis, Hågglund relies on a truncated, caricatured version of deconstruction when he claims that it is the decisive refutation of religion and that “deconstruction proceeds on a level of neutral, value-free descriptive analysis of the logic of time” (Caputo, 2015, p. 155). In fact, however, deconstruction is not about destroying religion by means of radical atheism; rather, it is a way of rereading and rethinking religion.

Caputo's views on deconstruction are largely shared by another influential continental philosopher of religion, Richard Kearney. Analyzing Derrida's statement that the name of God, like any other name, should be considered in the context of radical atheism, Kearney concludes that Derrida's purpose is not to abandon the phenomenon of God as such, but to sustain a general openness to difference without name, that is, without the identity of the historical givenness of the deity of historical religions (Kearney, 1999, p. 122). This general disposition to the arrival of the other, which is understood as the unpredictable occurrence of an event, is a messianicity that contradicts any form of the messianism of positive revelation. Therefore, according to Kearney, atheism for Derrida is not a total rejection of the idea of God, but rather a disagreement with the statement that a definite God is a condition for the possibility of God, who still has to come, to be named. While agreeing with Derrida's call for unconditional openness to the arrival of the other, Kearney nevertheless critically appreciates the assertion that the *arrivant* may be anyone or anything. He hopes that deconstruction waits for the coming of justice and associates this coming with the notion of a transcendent God who comes to save and liberate.

However, for Kearney, the possibility of combining the coming of this good God with the radical unpredictability of the future remains extremely problematic. Caputo ignores this problem, agreeing with Derrida that justice is concerned with the other, whose arrival cannot be predicted, while at the same time emphasizing that the other is always a victim and not a wrongdoer. Given that, as Derrida points out, anyone who comes can change his or her name and become anyone at any time, in “Desire of God” (1999) Kearney asks how we can distinguish between “between true and false prophets, between bringers of good and bringers of evil, between holy spirits and unholy ones ... between a living God and a dead one, between Elijah and his ‘phantom’, between messiahs and monsters” (Kearney, 1999, p. 127). Such a distinction is possible only if there are clear criteria. Without giving them, Derrida underestimates “the need for some kind of critical discernment based on informed judgment, hermeneutic memory, narrative imagination, and rational discrimination” (Kearney, 1999, p. 139).

However, it should be noted that Derrida's refusal to articulate a specific set of criteria does not mean that he underestimates the importance of identification and differentiation. On the contrary, Derrida argues that such acts are necessary because of the unpredictability of the future. We have to identify and make decisions each time because we are not able to predict in advance how the other will act. Establishing clear

preliminary criteria for the arrival of the other, Derrida points out, would be an act of discrimination and a restriction of unconditional universal hospitality – openness to the newcomer, whoever he may be. Total security is possible only if the possibility of something unexpected is closed. The rejection of the threat of trauma associated with the arrival of an unpredictable other is possible only at the expense of the rejection of the opportunity for transformation.

Another line of criticism of the messianic tradition of Lévinas and Derrida relies on a renewed reading of the texts of the Apostle Paul. In particular, we would like to mention such philosophers as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben. All of them, to one degree or another, accept Jacob Taubes' confidence in the determining role of messianism in the theology of the Apostle Paul. They also share the conviction that messianism was an important structural factor in the history of Western thought, finding expression not only in the Judeo-Christian religious heritage but also in secular phenomena. The findings of these philosophers signal a break with the phenomenological tradition of interpreting messianism. In particular, Badiou deploys criticism of Lévinas' ethic of alterity, which, in his belief, either falls into quasi-theological piety that emphasizes the absolute otherness of God or reduces itself to a liberal assertion of difference and individuality. Badiou's criticism of messianic ethics is based on a new reading of Pauline messianism. The Apostle's faithfulness to the event of Christ's resurrection serves as foundation for a new universal truth that eliminates the conflict between Jewish law and the Greek *logos*. If Badiou contrasts Lévinas' messianic otherness with Paul's messianic universality, Žižek calls into question Derrida's messianic future, relying on the urgency of the messianic moment of the Apostle's theology, his emphasis on the Messiah's coming. The Apostle's belief that the Messiah is here, according to Žižek, resists the Derridian existence in a state of uncertainty and constant delay, calling for life in the new space already opened by the Event of Christ (Žižek, 2003, pp. 136–137).

Conclusion

Summarizing the analysis of Derrida's concept of messianicity, it should be noted that despite the criticism it has faced, the concept of "messianicity without messianism" has already become an influential concept in contemporary philosophy of religion. In the context of current civilizational challenges, it calls for openness to an absolute, unpredictable future and a respect for the other. In our view, Derrida's philosophy of religion and his call for the deconstruction of traditional messianism should not be characterized as atheistic. Religious and political messianisms need constant deconstruction because, unlike abstract messianicity, they are incapable to respect the irreducibility of the other. However, their deconstruction is by no means an attempt to return to some sort of Enlightenment version of "religion within reason alone," for, as Derrida points out, religion and science share a common source—the primordial faith that forms the basis for any social connection and communication. Therefore, the deconstruction of messianisms means releasing religions from their fundamentalist claims in order to promote their openness to the other.

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